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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study observed and analyzed a group formed within a private Catholic school community on the eastern seaboard of the United States. The 25 parents within the group were from middle-class families and had children who were in grades 1 through 8. Meetings with group members were monitored, questionnaires were given to group members, and interviews were conducted. Results indicated that parents wanted ideas and suggestions to help their children become better readers. The group members also demonstrated a need to work and communicate with other parents experiencing similar problems. Parents stated that most of the ideas and suggestions offered within the group were useful. When the parents introduced new reading methods, their children seemed to show slow, steady progress. Findings suggest that this type of group may help children become better readers. (Contains 41 references. The letter to parents, a meeting summary letter, formal interview questions, the meeting questionnaire, the final meeting questionnaire, the texts of two proposed bills presented to the U.S. Congress designed to encourage parent participation, and the table of contents of the Goals 2000 law are attached.) (RS)

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THE PARENT CONNECTION:

A NECESSARY LINK IN ANY READING PROGRAM

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Abstract

Acknowledging that parents are an integral element in the development of children as lifelong readers, educators need to be aware of this element and help parents fulfill their role. One way in which educators are able to help with this endeavor is to guide and assist parents through such groups as a parent support group to aid in the development of their children as readers.

What components are involved in the establishment of a parent support group to enable parents to help their children in reading? A longitudinal study which lasted from February 22, 1994 to May 23, 1994 observed and analyzed a group formed within a private school community on the eastern seaboard of the United States. The parents within this group were from middle-class families and had children who were in grades one through eight. Meetings with the group were monitored, questionnaires were given to group members, and interviews were conducted.

The study showed that parents wanted ideas and suggestions to help their children become better readers. The group members also demonstrated a need to work and communicate with other parents experiencing similar problems. At the conclusion of this study, the parents stated that most of the ideas and suggestions offered within the group were

useful. When the parents introduced new reading methods, their children seemed to show slow, steady progress.

The implications for the future are that this type of group may help children become better readers. The results also imply that it would be useful to continue the meetings next year and to design a parent manual of ideas and suggestion to aid parents as they help their children. Each idea enhances a strong parent/school partnership to help the students become effective readers.

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THE TOPIC AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

> While parents frequently recognize the need for their children to be successful in school, they do not realize the critical role they play in their children's academic achievement. Parents often assume that the public school will take the place of the home in effecting their children's growth, but research does not support this assumption" (Snodgrass 1991, p.83).

Within the field of education today, it has been well proven that children's academic performance is proportional to the amount of involvement from the home (Calkins 1986, Epstein 1991, Snodgrass 1991, Olmsted 1991). It is, therefore, critical that the parents be continually involved in their children's academic activities. Since the parents' role in education is so vital to a student's success, there must be a constant effort from educators to help parents in the realization and development of this role.

Reading is an area where much research has suggested that the parent connection is critical to a student's success. "Parents play roles of inestimable importance in laying the foundation for learning to read. A parent is a child's first tutor in unraveling the fascinating puzzle of written language" (Anderson, et al. 1985, p. 27). Parents set examples within the home. The attitudes which they reflect and their willingness to help their

children are all critical to nurturing a love of reading. As educators, we must help parents to continue to be involved with their children in their academic experiences, and most specifically in the area of reading.

Several studies have shown the necessity of parental involvement in the academic growth of children. The role of the parent and its significance in literacy development has been addressed by such people as Snodgrass (1991), Berger (1991), McMackin (1993), and Smith (1991). There are studies which show clearly the direct relationship between the academic work done in the home with parental assistance and the success of the student (Epstein 1984). Lucy Calkins (1986) states:

> We hope parents will join us in celebrating and extending what young children do as language learners (p.45).

In the 1986 report compiled by the United States Department of Education on research about teaching and learning, What Works (Finn, 1986), there is evidence that the more reading done in the home, the more successful students will be in developing proper reading strategies. We, as educators, need to continue to help parents understand their role in the education of their child. Rucinski (1991), Olmstead (1991), and Schuur (1992) all offer ideas of how to keep parents involved in the development of their children as readers.

Each study that offers ideas for parent involvement [D'Angelo (1991), Epstein (1991) and Louv (1992)] stresses the point that there needs to be direct and personal contact initiated by the school in order to help parents in their role as educators. This contact is what makes the difference in

parental involvement. Personal and consistent involvement by the school with the parents helps them to help their children as they grow as literate young people in our world today.

Knowing how important the home/school connection is and knowing that the success of the students we teach is directly related to this connection. I, as a concerned educator of first grade children, firmly believe that those involved in education must take on part of the responsibility of guiding parents in their predetermined role as a partner in the education of their children. We must direct and aid parents so that we are working jointly to help students attain their fullest potential. We must acknowledge that no one person can do it all. The school and home need to work together.

Parents have often questioned me about what their peers are doing in helping their own children to become successful readers. I believe that this is the heart of the issue. I think that parents can help each other as they go through the day-to-day experiences with their children. Many parents have learned through previous experience with their older children how to assist younger ones within the family. Although each situation is certainly unique, a previous experience frequently gives some idea of how to help another child.

The development of a parent support group that would enable parents to help their children is one way of providing parents with ideas and methods that have worked for others. Parents need each other; meeting as a group is a way to fulfill this need. This group, which was established as this study

was being conducted, was composed of the parents from our own school population. The school is a private elementary school in a rural town in Maryland. The parents are primarily middle and upper middle class and place a high priority on their children's education. Any parent who wanted to be part of this group was welcomed.

The purpose of this study was to examine and monitor the components which are involved in the establishment of a parent support group to help children in the area of reading. Much of the research and information which was gathered was generated from the meetings of the parent support group.

THE PROBLEM

The development of a parent support group is a means of enabling parents to help their young children to become successful readers. Personal contact between educators and parents has been proven to be necessary for a successful home/school connection. The formation of this group provided the opportunity for this personal contact. The parents were educated in a variety of techniques for helping their children. Alternative strategies for assistance in reading were offered and discussion of methodologies presently used within the classroom were offered to aid those who were experiencing difficulties helping their children.

With any idea that is new, there is often a great deal of struggling and insecurity. At the group meetings there were follow-up discussions summarizing what was discussed in previous meetings. There was a lot of brainstorming of the parents' ideas and concerns in helping their children to become lifelong readers. I provided many resources which were helpful to the parents as alternative methods for assisting their children.

SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After reviewing what researchers are saying about the relationship of student success to parent involvement and after speaking to many concerned parents, I had the following questions:

Research Question:

What components are involved in the establishment of a parent support group to enable parents to help their children in reading?

Subsidiary Questions:

What do parents indicate that they need?

How do parents view the effectiveness of the suggestions presented at the meetings?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In developing and designing reading curricula, much time has been spent in finding out what is truly necessary to help children become lifelong readers. Several studies have looked at the home environment and the role parents play in helping their children develop as readers. "Parents and other adults (such as relatives and primary caregivers) have a fundamental and important influence on the development of the children in their lives" (Forlizzi et al. 1992, p. 10). What has been found is that parents, the children's first and most important educators, play a highly influential role in leading their children to acquire reading skills and strategies which will stay with them for a lifetime.

> A parent is a child's first guide through a vast and unfamiliar world. A parent is a child's first mentor on what words mean and how to mean things with words... A parent is a child's one enduring source of faith that somehow, sooner or later, he or she will become a good reader. (Anderson, et al. 1985, p.27)

Much research has been done over the years to design programs that would make families more literate and thus help students become better performers in schools. After looking at many alternatives, several researchers have found that families should continue to do today what has been done in the past. That is: parents should read to their children,

encourage reading through modeling, and provide their children with different forms of literature.

> For the past ten years, research has been substantiating what literate families have done naturally and intuitively. They have been sharing books with children for their delight and enjoyment - *not* to teach them to read. Yet their children have become avid readers and writers (Huck, 1992, p. 520).

All of the ideas suggested here, as well as many more scattered throughout the research literature, are founded on the basic premise that parents are truly their children's first and most influential educators. What parents do will influence the success a child will have in reading. "...parents, as their children's first and most important teachers, are a critical link to a successful reading program" (Rucinski, et al. 1991, p. 333).

Acknowledging the significance of parents' roles in guiding their children to become lifelong readers, research has centered around what activities parents should do within the home to enhance and develop their children's academic abilities. In most of this research, there are recurring themes of specific activities in which parents should become involved. The one that seems to be highlighted in every study is that parents themselves must be readers. "Children acquire behaviors that are effectively modeled by important people in their lives. Reading will certainly be valued by children who realize that reading is valued by their parents..."(Rasinski, 1991 p. 438). Not only should these adults read to and with their children, but they must also read daily within the home. Children look very carefully

at what their parents are doing. Seeing his/her parent read daily and thus model that reading is important, a child starts to understand that reading is something valuable and desirable.

Rasinski and Fredericks (March, 1991) in their study on the Akron Reading Project suggest that parents reading with children for as little as five minutes a day makes a difference. These researchers went on to suggest that even children who were having difficulties in reading would be helped if parents spent time reading each day with them. Unfortunately many of these parents considered themselves incapable of teaching their own children to read because it was a subject that was too difficult to teach. Rasinski and Fredericks believe that children will benefit greatly as they watch their parents read. It is also believed that this time spent between parent and child will create an atmosphere that encourages and enhances reading. "Paired reading offers the possibility of making parental involvement in reading easy, effective, and enjoyable" (Rasinski, 1991, p. 515).

Parents, who play such a significant role in helping their children, have many responsibilities to carry out in order for their children to become fluent and successful readers. Aside from the necessity of reading themselves to encourage their children, parents also need to provide them with many materials and opportunities.

Linguists Michael Halliday and Noam Chomsky, and reading researcher Marie Clay, among others, showed that when children are surrounded with the meaningful use of language - in all forms - they learn it readily

and make it work for them (Cullinan, 1989, p. 27).

In the government study, What Works (Finn, 1986), the Department of Education found that most American children spend about 1/25 of the time reading that they do watching television. The report went on to say that it is the parents' responsibility to encourage leisure reading by making books an essential part of the home. "A literate home environment doesn't teach children *how* to read; rather it provides children with opportunities to *enjoy* reading and discover the many ways it can be used to enrich the experiences in their lives" (Rasinski, 1991, p.439).

Research has clearly demonstrated the important role parents have in helping their children develop as lifelong readers. Specific suggestions of what can be done in the home to help children attain their fullest potential as young readers follow upon this firm ideological base. Many of these suggestions include practical activities and ideas which are already done in some homes.

> There are a number of ways to involve parents in their children's reading and writing development at home. All of them recognize the ways that parents have used for generations to support literacy development in the home (Rhodes, 1988, p. 274).

In several of the articles which address the issue of helping children to become lifelong readers [such as Hoffman (1983), Teale and Sulzby (1986), and Whitehead (1992)], the authors suggest that parents take some time and share books with their children. "Daily exposure to quality literature causes the children's reading habit to develop quite naturally and enthusiastically"

(Routman, 1988, p. 35) "When adults share books with them, children learn about how books work, and also about the pleasure one can derive from them" (Revelations From, 1991, p. 54). "It's valuable and fun to share the pleasures of reading with your children..." (Shanok, 1991, p. 119).

Aside from modeling good reading and sharing books with their children, parents have other alternatives which could be very useful within the home environment. As young readers make their first attempts, they need a lot of encouragement and praise. When they hear that they are doing well, children become more willing to keep trying. Parents who encourage children to reach for their highest academic potential unintentionally influence the success these children will have in reading.. It is this continuous praise that reinforces children's reading strategies. "Family settings which model organization, achievement values, and healthy communication have been shown to be positively related to children's success in academic endeavors" (Snodgrass, 1991 p. 84).

It is very important that parents talk about and discuss books with children. Parents also need to tell stories to their children and spend a great deal of time talking with their children. Talking about books, discussing stories with children, and retelling stories and events to children are all ways of letting these young learners become aware of the value of communication. The more they are immersed in reading and realize its significance, the more successful children will become at reading and dealing with language. "Behaviors linked to children's success include

parents' positive reinforcement of children's academic efforts, supervision of homework, reading, talking and telling stories" (Davies, 1991, p. 379).

As children become involved with reading and its benefits, they start to understand the need to know. Reading is one essential way in which these children have found that they can learn about life and their world. They can read and enjoy a pleasurable story or escape to lands and times unknown. Parents and adults can help children develop a real sense of the significance of reading and what it is about by providing experiences and materials which will help to stimulate their curiosity and interest.

Within the home, children should have readily available literature, books, and other instruments used to convey meaning and a message in our language. Bernice Cullinan (1993) tells parents that they need to know and understand their children's needs and interests. These needs and interests should be the basis for materials which are made available within the home. If parents are willing to make the effort to search for and provide their children with these type of materials, they "...can breathe the essence of literature into readers' lives and make readers for life" (Cullinan, 1993, p. 6).

Much of the research reviewed has pointed to the importance of strong parental involvement to lead a child to becoming a lifelong reader. While it is certainly necessary for parents to take this initiative from birth, once the child becomes involved with an educational institution, the responsibility must be shared. Historically parents have always played the most important role in educating their children. From birth, parents model good behavior,

provide the necessary care, and are responsible for all of those cognitive skills which start to develop in the child as a baby. Without daily positive support from parents, children will have trouble developing cognitively. "A school's success with children is highly dependent on the strength of those children's families..." (Coleman, 1991, p. 5).

So much of what is taught to children certainly takes place outside the school setting. Not only do children receive help from their parents in academics, but also in their personal development. Children, by being around their parents and other significant adults, develop attitudes and ideas which will remain with them for life. These attitudes and ideas which are seen and experienced daily by children, make up their personality, help develop values, and are the basis for the creation of each child as a unique and special individual. It is critical that parents accept their role as children's first and most important teachers. Although parents want to be involved in the educational process, they do not always feel as though they know how to help or what to do. "...many parents *want* to become actively involved in helping their children succeed, but they feel they don't get enough direction from schools and teachers for doing so" ("Make Parents", 1993, p. 52).

It is also necessary that parents continue in their role as one of their child's teachers as it has been shown that "the most important variable in an 8th grader's academic performance is parental involvement" (Vukelich, 1993, p. 224-A). Children grow older and get bigger, but they still need parental help even though older children do not often acknowledge the need

for help. "They may be bigger. They say they don't want help. But they want it and need it. You just have to change along with your children in the way you deliver support and advice" ("Make Reading" , 1993, p. A3).

Much research has been done which states that there has to be a continual and openly cooperative effort between the home and the school. "The emerging alliance between homes and schools comes from the recognition that not only are schools important to parents and families, but that schools also need the support of parents in order to achieve optimum success" (Berger, 1991, p. 209). Without this partnership between parents and schools, the children will not reach their fullest academic potential. "Many educators believe that a child's chances for success in later life are maximized when both the home and the school are involved in the child's education" (Olmsted, 1991, p. 221).

Realizing the importance of the home/school connection, it becomes necessary for schools to know what role they play in helping to develop and strengthen this connection. Those educators who are concerned about helping their students achieve their highest potential will certainly take advantage of the information gathered from the research on the home/school connection and do whatever may be possible to build a strong home/school relationship. "...[C]hildren's learning, development, and success (broadly defined), are the main reasons for home and school partnerships" (Epstein, 1992, p. 1141).

In much of the research which states that there needs to be a partnership established between the home and the school (Olmsted 1991, Epstein, 1991,

Epstein, 1992, & Coleman 1991), there are basic components suggested as being necessary for a successful program. All of the researchers have stated that there needs to be some form of open communication which is both regular and consistent. This communication often takes the form of a family newsletter which lets parents know what events are taking place at school. Obviously parents are more easily involved when they are made aware of the events and activities taking place.

Parents are more easily involved in their children's education when there is easy communication between the parent and educator. Educators have the responsibility to make themselves available to parents. In order to convince the parents of the necessity of helping their own children with school work, teachers must make parents feel that they can rely on the school when they have a question. Educators who make themselves accessible to parents are letting the parents know that they are also willing to help and that the children are also their first and foremost concern.

Another necessary component of the home/school connection is parental involvement in school programs. Most specifically parents should be involved in programs that are academic and that involve their own children. By assisting the teacher, parents can accomplish two important goals. First of all, they observe teaching methods that may help them in helping their own children. Too many parents are unsure about what they are doing and if it is helpful to their children. "Most parents help their children at home at times but do not know whether they are doing the right things or doing things right" (Epstien, 1992, p. 1142).

Secondly, parents who are in the classroom are obviously more aware of what is being done with their children academically. These parents know exactly what was taught in school and what their children should be capable of doing. Parents who help out in academic tasks are more aware of what expectations to have of their own children and have a clearer understanding of what expectations the teacher has for the students.

In order for parents to become involved with their children in the academic world, the parents need to be educated. They need to be taught what expectations teachers have for parents who are assisting their children, and what parents can do to help. "While programs vary considerably in scope and intensity, all recognize the importance of the family in promoting literacy..." (Handel, 1992, p. 116). It is crucial for schools to design ways for teaching parents how to help their own children.

Recognizing the significance of parental involvement in the success of students in school, many school districts in the United States are implementing programs to bring about this home/school partnership. "Since educators agree that schools cannot be successful without strong parental support, parent involvement programs now exist in almost every school in the United States" (Smith, 1991, p. 700). Schools are designing and conducting many programs which are parent-oriented and founded on the belief that parents need to be knowledgeable partners in education to make it work.

Parents, for their part, must also help to form this home/school relationship that will be beneficial to their children. Working with

educators, families can learn how and what to do to guide their children to grow to their fullest potential. Once parents realize the necessity of this type of partnership and willingly take part in it, the children will grow and flourish. Teachers' greatest hope is that "...parents will join us in celebrating and extending what young children do as language learners" (Calkins, 1986, p. 45).

A major component in developing a good parent program that fosters a child's reading ability is the education of parents. For this component to work, there must be individual contact between parents and teachers. Parents need to feel that they are important and that a healthy and friendly relationship between parent and educator can be formed. "New (or renewed) interest in parent involvement has not been around long enough to have developed 'conventional' wisdom - but if there were some, it would be that person-to-person communication is best" (D'Angelo, 1991, p. 351).

Support groups are one way to fulfill this need. A group can be formed with goals that are universal to all its members. These goals then become the basis for discussion and action within the group. Although there is currently no research validating the use of parent support groups for helping children to learn to read, their utility in meeting the diverse needs of other groups has long been established. In one of the books given to members of Al-Anon, the following quote is part of the explanation of the program. "For each of us, our own situation is the most difficult because it is the one through which we are struggling. The true importance of these shared

experiences lies in how Al-Anon helped each person arrive at a means of dealing with their particular problem" ("In All Our", 1992, p. X).

Parent support groups have been established throughout our nation. The development and formation of these groups has been initiated by schools that are concerned with strengthening the home/school connection. Many parents are very eager to join a support group within their school. Members have found that their struggles and trials with their own children are not unique but are often the same as those of others within the group. Knowing that others are having similar problems seems to provide a source of strength to parents. "The group makes you feel more confident because you find out that everyone is in the same boat" (Louv, 1993, p. 172).

To establish a support group that will be useful to concerned parents, the group must establish and clearly define a goal as the basis for its formation. As parents learn about the group, they will know if it is useful in helping them fulfill their own needs. "The success of any parent involvement strategy depends on how well it matches an individual parent's needs" (Vandergrift, 1993, p. 210).

Once the group's objective has been formulated, the group can begin to meet. A clear set of ideas and meeting plans will not always precede its formation. Ideally, as the facilitator meets with and talks to the group members, he/she will come to an understanding of what is needed and wanted by the group members (Fredericks, 1985). When a group is started it is often impossible to plan how and what will happen in the subsequent meetings. It is necessary for the person responsible for forming the group

to let the members know that it is for them that this group has been established. A facilitator needs to be very much aware of the needs and desires of the members of the group and must try to plan and coordinate activities which will be helpful in reaching these objectives. As Fredericks notes, "The best ideas will be those that are born of the needs of a specific group and tailored to the resources and talents available" (1985, p. 48).

In order for a support group to be useful in assisting parents to help their children in reading (as well as in other academic areas), parents must share ideas and suggestions that they have found to be helpful in their own situations. Parents do not want to be told that what they are doing is wrong. It appears to me that parents are more interested in talking with other adults about ideas and suggestions which are useful and which work! The facilitator is there to lead the discussion, offer suggestions and advice when asked, and even to help design programs and methods which will help parents assist their children.

Richard Louv (1993) studied a parent support group formed in the San Diego area. He has also researched families and the importance of interaction between parents and children. From this research and other that he has done, Louv has offered eight suggestions for a successful parent support group (Louv, 1993, p. 176):

1) Keep the group relatively small (10 - 15 parents is best).
2) Find a place to meet that is most convenient for your parents.
3) If possible, find a way to provide child care.
4) A professional may be the facilitator if you desire; however, it is important that discussions be open and parent-generated.
5) Plan meetings in advance.
6) Ask members not to give direct advice to other members. Some in the group would perceive this as criticism.
7) Establish rules that are agreeable to everyone from the start.
8) Encourage diversity. Allow any adults, including grandparents, to be members.

Schuur (1993), Binford (1991), and Powell (1991) have investigated successful parent support groups. Although they have some ideas that are unique to their particular research, these researchers all acknowledge the importance of three common elements which are: 1) parent-generated discussions, 2) facilitators who guide discussions but do not give unwanted advice, and 3) the institution of informal discussion which flows from ideas and situations offered by the various members. Facilitators are encouraged to design sessions which come from parent concerns indicated by the group's members. Facilitators are also encouraged to view the parent as an educator who assists his/her child to reach optimum success in becoming a lifelong reader.

There is certainly enough evidence to substantiate the fact that parents play a very important role in helping their children to become lifelong readers [Calkins (1986), Epstein (1991), Rucinski (1991), Snodgrass

(1991)]. Research studies indicate that without parental assistance, children will not develop appropriate reading strategies needed to reach their highest reading potential [Coleman (1991), Cullinan (1993), Handel (1992). Schools, which are aware of the parent/child connection, need to play a key role in assisting parents as they help their children to become lifelong readers. Parent support groups are one way for educators to accomplish this.

METHODOLOGY

This study took place in a private, Catholic school in a rural town located on the eastern seaboard of the United States. It was a longitudinal study which began on February 22, 1994 and was concluded on May 23, 1994. The names of the participants have all been changed to protect the privacy of those involved in this study. Within this school community, there are approximately one hundred seventy-five families. The majority of these families are from the middle class. It is from this population that I obtained participation for this research.

After much study and reflection, I decided that a parent support group was one means of aiding parents in their role as educators of their own children. After speaking with our school principal, I had permission to try to form this group as another means of helping our students and their families. To get this started, I invited all the parents in our school community to be part of this grass-roots foundation. I sent out a letter which explained why I felt it was necessary to start this type of group (see Apendix A for Figure 1). In response to the letter, approximately twenty-five parents joined the group. The meetings were held every other week for approximately one hour. At the opening meeting, I explained to the parents that I would like to include information from these meetings in my thesis study. Each of the parents gave me full permission to use any information I obtained. During this study I made use of several methods for obtaining

research. I used observation, formal and informal interviews, questionnaires and artifacts.

Throughout this study, I functioned as a participant observer. Each time we had a meeting, I was the person who conducted it. I took the responsibility for preparing and providing research on topics chosen for discussion. These observations were made for one hour every two weeks for a three-month period. As I was very involved in the meeting, I asked the parents' permission to tape record each session. I also had someone present at the meeting who noted the main ideas of each session. Following the meetings, I would review the meeting notes and make any comments which I felt were pertinent to what had been discussed. I also took time to listen to the audio tape and compare it to what was written. The purpose of employing several methods of accumulating data was to provide enough information so that this would be an in-depth study of a parent support group and its formation.

Some parents were not able to attend each meeting. As a means of continual communication, I wrote a summary letter and sent it home to each member of the parent support group. Figure 2 shows an example of one of these letters (see Appendix A for Figure 2).

Periodically, I had informal interviews with parents which usually lasted about ten minutes. Since these were not formal interviews, I used prompts. For each interview I chose from the list of prompts only those which were appropriate to the person being interviewed. The prompts were:

-Does your child have difficulty in the area of reading?

-Do you think that you need to do more to help your child to develop good reading strategies?

-Will joining with other parents help you?

-What specific concerns do you have that we might discuss at the parent support meetings?

-(When the group has been started) - Has this group been helpful in working with your child? How?

At the beginning of the formation of this group, I interviewed three parents. These formal interviews lasted about 20 minutes. Figure 3 shows the questions used in the formal interviews (see Appendix A for Figure 3). The parents were selected because of their participation in the parent support group and their availability which coincided with times at which I was available. (I realize that this creates a bias within this study. The research cannot be generalized for any parent support group, but is specific to the particular group and situation delineated within this study.)

There are very few artifacts in this particular research study. Most of what was generated has come from interviews, questionnaires or group discussions. Occasionally parents sent in letters to reaffirm the usefulness of this type of meeting and to thank me for taking the time to do this.

I made use of questionnaires at most of the meetings. These were specifically designed to be given to the parents as a means of recapping previous meetings and getting input from the group. The basic questionnaire format can be seen in Figure 4 (see Appendix A for Figure 4).

At the conclusion of this study, the parents were given a final questionnaire to fill out. (see Appendix A for Figure 5) This was used as a method of summarizing the group's activity throughout this study.

In the chart below, all of the methodologies used are listed. Each method is categorized and listed according to frequency of usage. As the chart reflects, most of the data collected is from personal contact with those parents who participated in this study.

Methodology Used February 22, 1994 - May 31, 1994				
	Participant Observations	Formal Interviews	Informal Interviews	Questionnaire
DATES				
February 22	X (60 min. session)	X	X	
March 08	X (60 min. session)		X	X
March 22	X (60 min. session)			X
April 12	X (60 min. session)			X
April 26	X (60 min. session)		X	X
May 10	X (60 min. session)		X	X
May 23	X (60 min. session)			X (Final)

DATA ANALYSIS

The data which has been analyzed was collected from February 22, 1994 to May 23, 1994. This data was gathered from members of a Parent Support Group which was formed at the beginning of this study after two to three years of informal investigation and research. This group was started to aid parents in their monumental responsibility of helping their children to succeed in school and to become lifelong readers. The names which were used have been changed to respect the privacy of the participants.

In order to form a group of this type, there has to be a common element which ensures its existence. In this case, several of the parents in this study expressed a desire to learn more about helping their children academically. "I want to be able to help my son. I know he needs assistance, but I do not know what to do" [Mrs. E. Formal Interview (FI) - 2/20/94]. "Coming to this school in third grade, I am sure there are many things I need to do to help my daughter. I hope to learn some ideas of how to help her" (Mrs. R. FI - 2/21/94). The parents often asked me for specific methods and ideas to help their children. This was the basis for starting the Parent Support Group. Parents could help each other, and I could also help them in their endeavors to guide their children academically.

Starting February 22, 1994, we met every other week. At the opening meeting, I asked the parents to share the concerns they were experiencing in helping their children. The first meeting consisted of an explanation of the

group's purpose and a brainstorming session in which the parents identified their concerns. We used these concerns as topics for future discussions. Below is a list of the concerns parents are experiencing with their children. This list was developed from the first meeting:

- 1) eliminating the struggle to read
- 2) overcoming the fear of failure in reading
- 3) improving reading comprehension
- 4) developing strategies for reading unfamiliar text
- 5) fostering independence in reading
- 6) developing effective writing skills
- 7) improving test-taking skills
- 8) developing study skills

In order for the reader to get a sense of what transpired at these meetings, I have chosen to give a brief overview of our sessions which were held every other week. The format throughout the time of this study did not vary. Originally, I had planned to open the meeting with a review and evaluation of the previous meeting. After this, I would present a few comments about the topic being discussed and then start an open discussion. This is not the way in which the meetings were conducted.

The parents truly wanted some type of presentation on the topic. After this they would be willing to discuss and share their own ideas. Below is a vignette from the second meeting on March 8, 1994. After discussing the previous meeting, I spoke briefly about the critical importance of mastering reading skills at a young age. I then attempted to begin a group discussion

in which ideas would be generated from one person to another through discussion. In trying to start this interchange, I found that the response was complete silence.

Sr. Frances Carol	"Tonight we are talking about reading strategies that can be used to help your child master critical reading skills at a young age. Would anyone like to share with the group a way, or ways in which you have helped your child to acquire these skills?"
	(Silence)
SFC	"Is there a way in which you read to your child which seems to create a lot of interest in a particular story?"
	(Again there was silence.)
SFC	"Would you like me to talk about some ways which I have found helpful within my classroom and during tutoring?"
	Here there was a unanimous "Yes".
SFC	"Does anyone want to start off or should I just begin?"
Mrs. H.	"We want you to share ideas with us. This is what we came for."
Mrs. R.	"We need ideas from you and then we can share.

At this point, I started to talk about strategies which I use. As the discussion continued, parents were very willing to join in and react to what I was saying.

It became obvious that the parents desired a short presentation which centered around the specific topic. In subsequent meetings, I prepared presentations according to the topic that was to be discussed.

To conclude each meeting, I asked the parents for a critique of the suggestions offered. Informally, I asked such questions as:

> Do you find these ideas helpful? How?
> Did you gather any information that will be of use to your child?
> Do you think these suggestions are significant to the topic discussed?

I also gave the participants a "Meeting Questionnaire" (Figure 4) and asked them to reflect on the questions and return it to me as soon as possible. Some parents expressed interest in the group but were unable to attend the meetings. Because of this, I composed a summary of each meeting and gave it to anyone who expressed interest in the Parent Support Group. Along with this summary, I attached a Meeting Questionnaire and any handouts which were distributed at the meetings.

The succeeding sessions followed the same format as this one. Since the topics were chosen at the previous meeting, I was prepared each week to present some strategies and suggestions that were relevant to the topic to be discussed. After speaking with the parents, I formulated a list of the topics which were most important to them. Below is a list of the meeting dates and the topics that were covered:

February 22, 1994 -	Opening Meeting
March 8, 1994 -	Developing Reading Strategies
March 21, 1994 -	Developing Study Skills (at home and at school)
April 12, 1994 -	Test Taking Preparation (how to understand the the questions and format)
April 26, 1994 -	Developing Writing Strategies
May 10, 1994 -	Increasing Reading Comprehension
May 23, 1994 -	Concluding Meeting (This meeting served as a time to look back and reflect on previous meetings.)

Because of the availability of so much literature about reading and its components, I was able to prepare handouts that were pertinent to the specific topic discussed. From participation in this group, observation at the meetings, formal and informal interviews with parents, and questionnaires that the parents filled out, I was able to gather some very valuable information.

PROBLEMS PERCEIVED BY THE PARENTS

To design sessions which would be useful and meaningful to the parents, I needed to know what questions the parents had and what problems they were experiencing with their children. I did this mostly

through interviews, informal conversations and questionnaires. The problems which seemed common to all, or most, of the parents were:

1) The children were reading words and not showing an understanding of the meaning of what they read.
2) Parents were afraid to help their children out of a fear of "doing something wrong".
3) The children were unable to deal with content oriented materials such as: Social Studies text, Science text, etc.
4) The children did not exhibit an enthusiasm or interest for reading.
5) The children did not write well.
6) The children struggled with tests and did not exhibit good study techniques.

It is also important to note that several parents said that they felt they were the only parent who was having problems with their child. These parents were sure that everyone else was doing a good job helping their children. "It's comforting to know that other parents are having trouble with their children. I felt that I was the only one who was having trouble until I came and listened to what the other parents were saying tonight," said Mrs. D. [Meeting Notes (MN) - 2/22/94]. "Just knowing that I'm not the only parent having problems with reading and homework has been very helpful to me" [Mrs. W., Questionnaire (Q) - 5/20/94].

STRATEGIES THAT WORKED BEST

ECHO READING

Parents in this study were looking for those ideas and suggestions which would be most beneficial to their children in helping them become better learners. Throughout the sessions of this group, there were several suggestions offered to aid parents as they helped their children. One idea that proved to be useful for beginning or struggling readers was the suggestion of Echo Reading. In this process, a parent repeats what the child is reading until he/she can read independently. This is one technique which helps the child while teaching and modeling proper reading. Parents told me several times that they really liked this idea. "Echo Reading was a very interesting concept" (Mrs. V., Q - 3/8/94). "I've already started Echo Reading with my daughter. It seems to be something she really likes" [Mrs. R., Informal Interview (II) - 3/13/94]. "I've tried several things, but I never heard of Echo Reading. My son really likes it when we do this together." (Mrs. D., II - 3/13/94). "Echo Reading has really helped me to help my daughter" (Mr. D., Q - 5/20/94).

MODELING READING

Another idea several parents found helpful was that of modeling reading; a strategy that emphasized the importance of reading. Children learn a lot from what they see done within the home. "Adults can facilitate the child's process of internalization through story telling sessions, modeling of reading behaviors, and interaction at the level of the child's

potential [L. S. Vygotsky's study (cited in Davidson, 1988, p. 20)]. Often children learn indirectly from others. A child learns that reading is enjoyable and important when he/she sees a parent reading. Several parents told me that they did not realize how important it was that their children saw them reading. "Now, I try and read while the girls are home, instead of while they are in school" (Mrs. W., Q - 5/20/94). "I guess I didn't think about reading in front of them. I always talked about reading and books and thought that was enough" (Ms. Z., MN- 3/8/94). "I am an avid reader. I read all of the time, but I'm really not sure that my girls see me doing it. I'll have to watch that" (Mrs. V. MN - 3/8/94).

Many parents told me that after the meeting of March 8, 1994 that their family routines and schedules changed. These parents became much more conscious of the necessity of modeling appropriate reading behaviors which would indirectly help their own children to learn. "We never sat down as a family to read. Now we take time together. I also read a lot in front of my son. He has even commented on this" (Ms. Z. - II - 3/15/94). "After dinner, I often read now. My boys go and get books also. This never happened before" (Mrs. S. - II - 3/21/94).

PRE-READING STRATEGIES

Another suggestion to increase a child's comprehension was the use of pre-reading strategies. At one of the sessions, we talked about ways to build up interest and excitement before beginning to read a piece of literature. Some of the suggestions were questioning the reader to see what is already known, talking about the subject which will soon be read,

recalling a prior experience which is relevant to a particular story, and predicting outcomes from chapter titles and illustrations.

The parents felt that these were ideas which could certainly help their children. "I've started to ask my daughter questions before she starts to read. I like this idea because it seems to make her think about what she is reading (Mr. R. - II, 5/17/94). "I really have a time trying to get my child to read. She does not seem to be able to think about what she is reading. Maybe I can interest her by talking about what she is going to read. I like that idea" (Mrs. P - MN, 5/10/94). "I never really thought about preparing my children for the story. What a great idea" (Mrs. E. - Q, 5/10/94). "No matter what we already know, there is always more we can learn. The suggestions and examples from the last meeting really help" (Mrs. W. - MN, 5/23/94).

JOURNAL WRITING

Often parents have indicated to me that they are quite aware of the need for their children to develop proper writing skills. In the formal interview session with Mrs. R., she said,

> In business, or in anything you do, how you write says a lot about you. If you do not write properly, people do not want to read what you have written. It is essential that our children develop proper writing skills (2/22/94).

One of the topics which was discussed was developing writing skills. The main focus of this session was to give the children plenty of opportunities to write. It was also suggested that children need to be able to

write without fearing a lot of corrections and changes in what they have written. Therefore, journal writing was suggested. Parents can give the children an opportunity to write without any risk of criticism or correction. The journal is the property of the writer and only shared at the author's discretion. I suggested that the parents might consider writing in a journal. If the parents are comfortable doing this, the child and parent could trade journals back and forth. As the parent writes, proper writing is being modeled. "I never had a journal. By the way you talk, I want to run right out and get one. I think my girls would like one, too" (Mrs. W. - MN, 4/26/94). "I'm anxious to try one. I love to write, but I never had a journal. This could be fun!" (Mrs. V. - MN, 4/26/94).

Since it is well known in the field of education that reading and writing are connected, it was suggested that children might like to write in response to what they are reading. I suggested that if parents also wrote, this would be a wonderful model for their children.. After a time of family reading, everyone writes in a journal. The logical conclusion of this family literacy time would be a sharing session. Each person may choose to either share from his/her journal or speak about what she/he has read.

One mother thought that writing would be an excellent way for her to know a little more about what her daughter was reading. This mother felt that the writing would be enjoyable for her daughter. She also felt that by writing with her daughter, she would come to know more about her. "My daughter likes to read by herself, or with her younger sisters. She doesn't like me to be there. Maybe this will be good for her. She seems to enjoy

writing and I'd like to know what she's doing" (Mrs. C. - Q, 4/28/94). Conversely, another mother sees writing as a difficult task for her son. She hopes this suggestion will be a way of developing writing interest in him. "My son is so afraid to make a mistake. He never writes in his journal except for simple things. I hope this helps. I want to do it with him" (Mrs. D. - MN, 4/26/94).

USE OF INTEREST MATERIALS

The subject of motivation in reading was highlighted at the beginning of the session discussing reading comprehension skills. When the group was asked if their children were motivated readers, the response was less than encouraging. Many parents indicated that their children find it boring.

One way I suggested to stimulate the desire to read was to provide materials which were of interest to the child. Another way was to question the children about the material so that they had a reason for and interest in reading the material. Children have so many interests and ideas. It seems a shame not to take advantage of these to help them become motivated readers.

The parents felt that these suggestions were worthwhile. They never thought of providing books and other materials on a specific subject for their children to entice them to read more. "I never gave much thought to finding books that were about a certain subject my son liked. That might work " (Mrs. D. - MN, 2/22/94). "My child is very interested in the planets. Maybe if I get some books about this, he'll want to read more (Mrs. E. - MN, 2/22/94). "I'm not sure what would interest my daughter,

but maybe we can go together and find books she'll like. I'll do anything to help her want to read" (Mrs. P. Q, 3/8/94). It seems the more interest children have in a specific area, the more willing they are to obtain information on this topic.

STUDY AND TEST TAKING SKILLS

There were two meetings which covered the study and test taking skills. Many parents expressed interest in these subjects as they saw their children in need of help in these areas. "My child has so many problems reading material for other subjects. Can you give some suggestions?" (Mr. P - MN, 3/8/94). "The material seems so obvious yet my daughter just doesn't seem to understand" (Mrs. S. - MN, 3/21/94). "My son will study for a test and bomb it. I can't figure out if he's studying wrong or if he doesn't know what to do with the test" (Ms. Z. - MN, 3/21/94).

The first meeting focused on study skills. The Cornell method of note taking was explained and discussed. This method involves writing notes from the text and then developing questions from these written notes. The student uses these questions as a review of the material that is written. A great deal of time was spent going over how to look at texts and what to study. The parents found it very helpful to know that words and main ideas were highlighted in textbooks. One parent even commented later that she did not know how to use these visual aids during her time in school. "I wish I had known to look at the darkened words when I was in school. Maybe I would have done better. Now my children will have the advantage of this information" [Mrs. C. - Final Questionnaire (FQ, 5/23/94]. They

were also amazed when I suggested that they go to the back of the chapter and read the questions before reading the chapter text. "I thought that was cheating. Can we really tell our children to do it?" (Mrs. S. - MN, 3/21/94). Parents were encouraged to show their children how to look at chapter headings, highlighted words, and pictures or charts before reading. Browsing a chapter in this manner is a pre-reading strategy which creates interest in material which otherwise might have been dull and boring.

To assist the parents in helping their children with test taking, we went over the various formats of tests. Many of the suggestions which we discussed at this meeting were covered at the meetings on reading and writing strategies. For many parents it was most beneficial to help them make the connection that the same reading and writing strategies could be used for tests as are used in other academic activities. "The ideas are similar to what we discussed before. I never thought of showing my children how to 'read' a test" (Mrs. W. - MN, 4/12/94). "When we were finished discussing test taking, I was surprised that I knew a lot of the information. I just didn't think reading and writing skills could be taught for test taking" (Mrs. E. H, 4/14/94). "I think the sessions on test taking and study skills will be very helpful for my son. There were great ideas which I'm sure will be useful" (Mrs. D. H, 4/17/94).

SUMMARY NOTES

Aside from the strategies which we discussed at the meetings, the parents also felt that the summaries from each meeting were very helpful. Although I had not originally planned to write a summary of our sessions,

the parents requested it and this seemed to be very beneficial. Parents who are part of the group use these as a reference. "I keep a file which I can refer to whenever I have a problem or question" (Mrs. R. FQ - 5/23/94). "I'm especially thankful to you for sending home each meeting's notes so we can use them for future reference" (Mrs. D. - FQ - 5/27/94).

Parents who had not attended the meetings, but requested the summaries, also found them to be helpful. "I'm grateful for the time you spend preparing the notes. I wish I could come to the meetings. Since I can't come, I feel like I'm getting many good ideas from those notes" (Mrs. FS. - II, 4/15/94). "I've filed away all the notes in a reference file and know they will be helpful as MC approaches the time she will read on her own" (Mrs. CR - Letter written on May 24, 1994). "I hear that you have notes from all of your meetings. I'm told they will be helpful. I'm interested in getting them so I can work with my son during this summer and as he enters middle school" (Mrs. GG - Phone Conversation, May 27, 1994).

HOW PARENTS AND CHILDREN HAVE BENEFITED

All of the ideas discussed are used daily in the field of reading. These are strategies which are encouraged as means of leading children to become lifelong readers. As the group met, the main goal was always to help parents help their children. At the conclusion of these meetings, I hoped that some type of change occurred for the parents and children. It did!

From the parents' point of view, they were more confident and willing to help their children. They felt more prepared to meet the needs of their sons/daughters. The parents no longer felt a fear of misguiding their children as they helped them. Parents also felt that the strategies and ideas they learned were useful in working with their children. From the parents' perspective this was time well spent.

The following vignettes corroborate the parent's feelings of how advantageous the parent support group was. "I learned new ways to reinforce things he was already doing. I have a better understanding of how to guide him in putting his thoughts together" (Mrs. D. - FQ, 5/27/94). "I never thought the different suggestions would help me so much. My daughter really enjoys when we work together now" (Mrs. P - II, 5/26/94). "As I see my children having trouble, I'm more able to help them" (Mr. D - FQ, 5/23/94). "I wasn't able to come to many meetings, but I learned a lot when I was there. I hope they continue next year" (Mrs. TC - II, 5/27/94). These parents, and many more, felt that the Parent Support Group was beneficial to them in fulfilling their role as the primary educator of their own children.

The parents who were part of this endeavor felt that it was beneficial for their children. Some of these parents saw their children's attitudes toward reading become more positive. Although they were not sure if these changes occurred solely because of this group, the parents certainly felt that these changes happened partially because of their involvement in the Parent Support Group.

> I'm not sure if my child grew into reading or if it was from the different suggestions that I learned during our meetings. Somehow I feel it is due in part to what I am now able to do to help him with his reading and other school work (Mrs. S - FQ, 5/23/94).
>
> My daughter really enjoys reading now. We sit and work together. I think that Echo Reading was very helpful in leading her to learn to love reading more (Mrs. R. II - 5/20/94).

"I have started a journal since starting this group. I share most of my writings with the girls and they seem very interested" (Mrs. W - FQ, 5/23/94). "I find that my children are much more involved in reading. They enjoy picking up a book and sitting down to read as a family. These suggestions have been very good for all of our family" (Mrs. E. - II, 5/27/94).

The Parent Support Group was formed because of concerns which parents expressed to me over the past few years. They felt that if they could come together and discuss problems which their children were experiencing maybe they would find some answers. The research in this study has shown that this group has been successful.

In order for this type of group to be meaningful and useful to those involved, it must meet the needs of its members. In this case, the group was established with the common goal of finding ways for parents to help their children. The areas in which parents were experiencing difficulties became the topics of the meetings. It was during these meetings that parents came

together, talked about their concerns, and developed ways to help their children.

As I indicated previously, from the first meeting, I became aware of the fact that the parents were expecting me to start each meeting offering ideas which were relevant to the topic we were discussing. Parents would often ask for a specific suggestion for a problem which came up in discussion during our meetings. In the preceding pages I have explained strategies and suggestions which were demonstrated at the meetings. I also noted how receptive parents were to these suggestions and how much they felt their children have benefited from the strategies we covered.

The population of this group was unique. It consisted of a group of parents who were dedicated to their children's academic endeavors. These parents placed a high priority on ensuring that their children received the best education possible. Because the group members valued education so highly, the work done within this group was extremely successful. The group was formed out of needs expressed by the parents. The meetings centered around the needs of the parents and their children; and the topics were very significant to the parents within this group. These factors were all responsible for making this a highly successful beginning group.

Hopefully, the group will continue in the following years and be as meaningful to the members who choose to take part in it. "I am hopeful that this group will continue next year. I have benefited greatly and know that I will need more help as my son gets older. I am sure that other parents will also benefit" (Mrs. E. - II, 5/27/94).

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Parents play an important role in the education of their children. As primary educators, parents have many responsibilities. The most important one is to help young children become lifelong learners. Although educators are responsible for helping in this growth and development, the obligation is still primarily in the hands of the child's parents. They must also provide the opportunities, experiences and daily events that will enhance and assist their children to grow and mature.

Educators are responsible for helping parents in this overwhelming task of educating their children. It is educators' responsibility to help the children and to assist the parents in their daily endeavors. If educators want to fulfill their mission, they must be aware of what parents want and need to help them in guiding and directing their own children.

This longitudinal study was designed to create a program that would address the needs and concerns parents were experiencing while helping their children to develop as readers. The implementation of a parent support group was the means of meeting the needs of the parents and of helping them to learn how to assist their own children. In order to make this study useful for the parents, it was necessary to come to an understanding of what parents needed to help them achieve this goal of assisting their children to develop as lifelong learners. The parents were

given the opportunity to express their concerns so that these ideas would be the basis for discussion in future meetings.

The meetings started on February 22, 1994, and lasted for three months. During this time the parents became actively involved in the parent support group and were eager to be a part of it. Several parents felt that meeting as a group accomplished these things:

1) Parents realized that they were not unique when they experienced difficulties helping their own children.
2) Parents realized that they were able to help their own children and make these endeavors successful and meaningful.
3) Parents realized that there were many things that could be done daily within the home which would help children to become lifelong learners.
4) Parents found many and various ways to help their children grow and develop as readers.

This study took place in a small, private elementary school on the east coast of the United States. The group which evolved from this study was designed specifically for this particular population. Therefore, the results are not generalizable, but specific for the group which was formed. Now that the study is concluded, there are some questions which have developed from the research which took place.

Knowing that this group was designed to meet the specific needs of the families within this particular school, it would be interesting to see if the same type of group would be as successful in another environment. Would

a parent support group help families who have children in a public school system? Would this same type of group be as meaningful and as significant in a school system composed only of middle school students? These questions can only be answered if further studies are conducted.

Several times the parents commented on the usefulness of the suggestions offered at the meetings. The parents felt that the ideas offered were relevant and helpful for the problems which were discussed. Parents found the meeting notes to be useful and significant for their children. Parents even commented that they would save meeting notes and suggestions for future reference.

Would it be helpful to design a parent handbook for reading? This book might offer information that would help a parent in detecting when his/her child is having difficulty. The handbook might also offer many types of reading suggestions. Using the information gathered from this study, a book could be compiled with the suggestions and ideas which have been offered during these last three months. The purpose of this type of book would be to allow the parents to have something readily available when working with their children.

Throughout the study, the parents commented that they felt their children benefited from what they learned at these meetings. One mother even thought that part of her son's growth in reading came from things which she learned during the different sessions. It would be very interesting to try to determine if children improved in their reading ability because of the parent support group. Once the parents have signed up to

be part of the group, the facilitator would track the children whose parents have joined. From the study it might be possible to determine the effectiveness of some of the ideas suggested to the parents during these past three months.

On June 16, 1993 a bill (S. 1118) was introduced in the Senate of the United States by Senator Hatfield, a Republican from Oregon. (see Appendix B for Figure 6). The same bill (H.R. 2712) was introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative McCurdy, a Democrat from Oklahoma, on July 22, 1993 (see Appendix B for Figure 7). These two bills were referred to committees for further study. They were introduced to encourage parental participation within the educational framework. On March 31, 1994, the two bills became part of Public Law - 103 - 227 which is known as, "Goals 2000: Educate America Act". (see Appendix B for Figure 8). The purpose of this law is to bring about educational reform by the year 2000.

To help students achieve their fullest potential, educators must look at every possible way to assist them in their endeavors. The research that has been compiled within this study was started to respond to a need and to strengthen the partnership between the parents and the school. The parents had expressed a need for help and guidance.

There needs to be an active partnership between the parents and the school. This relationship is so critical to education that a public law was drawn up to help achieve this goal. Obviously the research within this study has been validated through the signing of this bill. Not only did the

parents in this particular group see the validity of the work accomplished, but it has also become so necessary to form this type of partnership that a law was drafted, signed and published which states that parental partnerships with schools are a necessity to an educational institu designed to meet the needs of its children.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX - A

(Figure - 1)

Dear Parents,

Over the past several months, several parents within our school have spoken to me concerning their children and the best way to help them academically. In the course of these conversations, parents have expressed the desire to talk to other parents and see how they feel about their own children and/or what they are doing at home to help their own family. From these many discussions, I have come up with an idea that I think would be a great benefit to many parents.

I would like to see a parent support group formed. The purpose of this group is to bring parents together to see if they can benefit from each other's experiences with their children. A parent who is having difficulty in helping a child academically might be able to discuss the problem and find that some other parent has worked through the same situation and has come up with a workable solution. This group would meet bi-weekly and discussions would generate from the needs of members within the group.

My role within this group would be as facilitator. I would be there to help in any way that would ease some of the difficulties that parents are experiencing in helping their children meet the challenge of the academic world. I would be able to provide many resources and even offer some ideas which I have learned during my years of experience as an educator. After much prayer and thought, I feel that many would benefit from starting a group where we would work to support and help others within our own school community.

If you would like to be part of this group, please fill in the form below and return it to school on Monday. Once these are returned, you will be notified as to the day that seems to be best for the gathering.

May Our Lord bless this endeavor which comes from His Divine inspiration and is offered for His greater glory.

Sr. Frances Carol, OSFS

****

___Yes, I would like to participate in the Parent Support group.

___Monday evening is best for me.

___Tuesday evening is best for me.

___Either evening is fine.

(Signed)_____

(Figure - 2)

Dear Parents,

The second meeting of the Parent Support Group was held on March 8th. The main topic of interest was - Reading Strategies. I will give you a listing of many of the ideas and suggestions which were discussed. If anything is unclear or you are not sure how to deal with a particular suggestion, please feel free to contact me. I have attached a pamphlet which I gave to those who attended the meeting. Parts of this may, or may not, be helpful. It really explains a lot of what we discussed on Tuesday evening.

Strategies Discussed

***These ideas are not in a particular order, but simply the way in which we discussed them.

In order for the children to come to an awareness of the value of reading, they **need to see each of us reading**. Adult reading should not take place only after the children are in bed, but must be done in front of and with them. We need to "set the example".

It would be a wonderful thing if **each family set aside a time when all of the members sat down together and read**. I know that everyone is very busy, but this would really be helpful for the children. When the reading time is over, there should be a couple minutes of sharing and discussing.

Jim Trelease, one of the top people in the field of reading, says that we need to stop reading and discuss what interests us. He has a book Hey, Listen to This! This book is based on the idea that as we read near one another, we stop and share by saying - Hey, listen to this. **We should talk and listen to each other. This builds interest and a purpose for reading.**

Within my classroom, we have SSR (Sustained Silent Reading). At the beginning of the afternoon, we have a silent reading time. The children know that during this time everyone who is in the classroom is to read. It is very important that there are no questions or disruptions from one another. The children seem to enjoy this time.

Children need to know that **different selections are read in different ways**. A newspaper article is certainly read in a different way than a fairy tale. Notes which are written to one another are read differently than a story, etc. Notes are an excellent way for children to become aware of writing as a means of communication. We need to read aloud and model reading strategies for different selections.

To develop reading strategies, **we should show children how we read**. When the children are young (from birth through about the beginning of first grade), we should show left to right reading, sweep our hand under words and point to where we are in books. As the children become more aware of the print order, we can

(Figure - 2 cont.)

show the sweeping motion under words to help eliminate choppy reading and build fluency but start letting the children deal with the text by simply watching you read and share pictures, etc.

To develop motivation and interest, **give children books in which they are interested**. Also allow the children to choose most, or all, of the reading selections. This will also improve fluency as the children become familiar with the text by rereading an interesting book.

Ways to activate interest in books:

- allowing children to predict the story before reading and discuss the predictions while reading
- look at and discuss chapter headings
- look at drawings within books and discuss what they mean
- show relationships between books and events present in children's lives
- have children analyze characters' actions
- discuss opinion of books read (why like or do not like)

Offer a variety of topics for reading. Even the smallest area of interest may spark a child to read about something. We want to motivate the children to reading and this can be done by sparking an interest area.

It is critical not to overcorrect the children. If a child makes an error which does not disrupt the thought behind reading, it is not necessary to correct every time. However, if the error is repeated, then the child's attention can be drawn to this error. Obviously, as the children become better at reading, there will be less attention drawn to helping them develop the mechanics. Really, we are trying to develop **readers who read for meaning**. Constant correction and stopping will only discourage the reader.

The final suggestion is to use **echo reading**. In this strategy, the parent and child sit side-by-side to read a book. As the child reads, the parent is a split second behind the child in reading the same sentence. The child hears how to read properly a sentence, story, etc. and has modeling of voice inflection, etc. The idea is done mainly to develop good reading strategies , but is also a tool used for the troubled reader. (For more details, please feel free to ask.)

Our time together was very busy and very interesting. The parents seemed to feel that these ideas would be helpful for their children. Not every idea will work for every child. You may have a better idea. Please feel free to share them with us and to join us for our next meeting on March 22nd. The topic will be **study and organizational skills**.

Sr. Frances Carol, OSFS

(Figure - 3)

Formal Interview Questions

Why have you decided to join the Parent Support Group?

What are your needs in joining this group?

What do you hope is accomplished during these months together?

In most families, one parent has more of the responsibility in helping the child with academics? Are you the parent who works with your child?

Do you feel that your child has problems academically that might be helped in this type of group?

Do you have suggestions of ideas which might help other parents who will be coming to the meetings?

What things have worked for you?

What things do you find not to be helpful in working with your child?

Do you feel that you are successful in helping your child with school work? Why or why not?

Are there any other comments you would like to make?

(Figure - 4)

Meeting Questionnaire

Did you find the last meeting helpful for the needs of your child(ren)? Why or why not?

What was most helpful? [or not helpful if the meeting was not of value for your child(ren)]

What strategies suggested at our last meeting seemed to work?

Do you have any suggestions which we could offer to the rest of the group?

Are there things that we need to change to make the meetings more productive?

(Figure - 5)

Final Meeting Questionnaire

Dear Parents,

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire for the conclusion of the Parent Support Group I would appreciate it if you would answer these questions and return it to me by Friday, the 20th

Thank you,
Sr Frances Carol, OSFS

1) Do you feel that your child reads more since the beginning of this group? Could you please give examples?

2) What strategies and ideas suggested have been most helpful to you?

3) Have the attitudes of your child, and/or yourself, changed as a reader since becoming involved in this group? How?

4) What has been most helpful for you in regard to this Parent Support Group?

5) What ideas, suggestions, etc were not helpful to you?

6) Are there ways in which the meetings could have been more helpful for you?

7) What implications do you see for future meetings?

***Please feel free to make any additional comments on the back of this paper

Thank you

APPENDIX - B

(Figure - 6)

103D CONGRESS
1ST SESSION *H.R. 2712*

To establish an additional National Education Goal relating to parental participation in both the formal and informal education of their children, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 22, 1993
Mr. MCCURDY introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor

A BILL

To establish an additional National Education Goal relating to parental participation in both the formal and informal education of their children, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "National Education Goal for Parental Participation Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that-

(Figure - 6 cont.)

(1) parents and families are the child's first and primary teacher and a continuing influence throughout the school years;

(2) children whose parents are involved in the educational process at home and at school demonstrate higher academic achievement levels than do children who have similar aptitude and family backgrounds and who have parents who are not involved;

(3) student behavior and achievement improves in schools that establish strong communication with parents and institute programs that utilize the talents of parents in policy formation and implementation;

(4) recent surveys have shown that while more parents are becoming involved in some way with their child's education, far too many parents are faced with institutional barriers to involvement;

(5) effective parental involvement programs that are already in place should be disseminated as models to school districts around the country;

(6) the Federal Government has established excellent opportunities for parents to become involved in Head Start programs, programs for children who are disabled, and programs for children under chap-

(Figure - 6 cont.)

ter 1 of title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965;

(7) such opportunities need to be provided in other preschool, elementary and secondary programs;

(8) there is limited research and professional development opportunity for teachers and administrators in implementing parent involvement programs; and

(9) as a condition that is fundamental to the successful achievement of the first six National Education Goals, parental involvement should be recognized as a Goal in itself.

SEC. 3. NEW EDUCATION GOAL.

(a) GOAL.-It shall be established by the National Education Goals Panel as a National Education Goal, that by the year 2000, every school and home will engage in partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

(b) OBJECTIVES.-The objectives of the Goal established under subsection (a) are that-

(1) every State will develop policies to assist local schools and school districts to establish programs for increasing partnerships that respond to

(Figure - 6 cont.)

the varying needs of parents and the home, including parents of children who are disadvantaged, bilingual or disabled;

(2) every school will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decision-making at school;

(3) every home will be responsible for creating an environment of respect for education, providing the physical and emotional support needed for learning; and

(4) parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability.

(Figure - 7)

103D CONGRESS
1ST SESSION *S. 1118*

To establish an additional National Education Goal relating to parental participation in both the formal and informal education of their children, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 16, 1993
Mr. HATFIELD introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources

A BILL

To establish an additional National Education Goal relating to parental participation in both the formal and informal education of their children, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "National Education Goal for Parental Participation Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that-

(Figure -7 cont.)

(1) parents and families are the child's first and primary teacher and a continuing influence throughout the school years;

(2) children whose parents are involved in the educational process at home and at school demonstrate higher academic achievement levels than do children who have similar aptitude and family backgrounds and who have parents who are not involved;

(3) student behavior and achievement improves in schools that establish strong communication with parents and institute programs that utilize the talents of parents in policy formation and implementation;

(4) recent surveys have shown that while more parents are becoming involved in some way with their child's education, far too many parents are faced with institutional barriers to involvement;

(5) effective parental involvement programs that are already in place should be disseminated as models to school districts around the country;

(6) the Federal Government has established excellent opportunities for parents to become involved in Head Start programs, programs for children who are disabled, and programs for children under chap-

(Figure -7 cont.)

ter 1 of title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965;

(7) such opportunities need to be provided in other preschool, elementary and secondary programs;

(8) there is limited research and professional development opportunity for teachers and administrators in implementing parent involvement programs; and

(9) as a condition that is fundamental to the successful achievement of the first six National Education Goals, parental involvement should be recognized as a Goal in itself.

SEC. 3. NEW EDUCATION GOAL.

(a) GOAL.-It shall be established by the National Education Goals Panel as a National Education Goal, that by the year 2000, every school and home will engage in partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

(b) OBJECTIVES.-The objectives of the Goal established under subsection (a) are that-

(1) every State will develop policies to assist local schools and school districts to establish programs for increasing partnerships that respond to

(Figure -7 cont.)

the varying needs of parents and the home, including parents of children who are disadvantaged, bilingual or disabled;

(2) every school will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decision-making at school;

(3) every home will be responsible for creating an environment of respect for education, providing the physical and emotional support needed for learning; and

(4) parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability.

(Figure 8)

PUBLIC LAW 103-227-MAR. 31,1994

Public Law 103-227
103d Congress

An Act

To improve learning and teaching by providing a national framework for education reform; to promote the research, consensus building, and systemic changes needed to ensure equitable educational opportunities and high levels of educational achievement for all students; to provide a framework for reauthorization of all Federal education programs; to promote the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards and certifications; and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE -This Act (other than titles V and IX) may be cited as the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act"

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS -The table of contents is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
Sec. 2. Purpose.
Sec. 3. Definitions.

TITLE I-NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS

Sec. 101. Purpose.
Sec. 102. National education goals.

TITLE II-NATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM LEADERSHIP, STANDARDS, AND ASSESSMENTS

PART A-NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

Sec. 201. Purpose.
Sec. 202. National Education Goals Panel.
Sec. 203. Duties.
Sec. 204. Powers of the Goals Panel.
Sec. 205. Administrative provisions.
Sec. 206. Director and staff; experts and consultants.
Sec. 207. Early childhood assessment.

(Figure - 8 cont.)

PART B -NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS AND IMPROVEMENT COUNCIL

Sec 211. Purpose.
Sec 212. National Education Standards and Improvement Council.
Sec 213. Duties.
Sec 214. Annual reports.
Sec 215. Powers of the Council.
Sec 216. Publication for public comment.
Sec 217. Administrative provisions.
Sec 218. Director and staff, experts and consultants.
Sec 219. Opportunity-To-Learn Development Grant.
Sec 220. Assessment development and evaluation grants.
Sec 221. Evaluation.

PART C - LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Sec 231. Purposes.
Sec 232. Federal leadership.
Sec 233. Office of educational technology.
Sec 234. Uses of funds.
Sec 235. Non-Federal share.
Sec 236. Office of training technology transfer.

PART D - AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS

Sec 241. Authorization of appropriations.

TITLE III - STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATION SYSTEMATIC IMPROVEMENT

Sec 301. Findings.
Sec 302. Purpose.
Sec 303. Authorization of appropriations.
Sec 304. Allotment of funds.
Sec 305. State applications.
Sec 306. State improvement plans.
Sec 307. Secretary's review of applications; payments.
Sec 308. State use of funds.
Sec 309. Subgrants for local reform and professional development.
Sec 310. Availability of information and training.
Sec 311. Waivers of statutory and regulatory requirements.
Sec 312. Progress reports.
Sec 313. Technical and other assistance regarding school finance equity.
Sec 314. National leadership.
Sec 315. Assistance to the outlying areas and to the Secretary of the Interior.
Sec 316. Clarification regarding State standards and assessments.

(Figure - 8 cont.)

Sec 317 State planning for improving student achievement through integration of technology into the curriculum
Sec 318 Prohibition on Federal mandates, direction and control
Sec 319 State and local government control of education

TITLE IV - PARENTAL ASSISTANCE

Sec 401 Parental information and resource centers
Sec 402 Applications
Sec 403 Use of funds
Sec 404 Technical assistance
Sec 405 Definitions
Sec 406 Reports
Sec 407 General provision
Sec 408 Authorization of appropriations

TITLE V-NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS BOARD

Sec 501 Short title
Sec 502 Purpose
Sec 503 Establishment of National Board
Sec 504 Functions of the National Board
Sec 505 Deadlines
Sec 506 Reports
Sec 507 Authorization of appropriations
Sec 508 Definitions
Sec 509 Sunset provision

TITLE VI-INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Sec 601 International Education Program

TITLE VII-SAFE SCHOOLS

Sec 701 Short title, statement of purpose
Sec 702 Safe schools program authorized
Sec 703 Eligible applicants
Sec 704 Applications and plans
Sec 705 Use of funds
Sec 706 National activities
Sec 707 National cooperative education statistics system
Sec 708 Reports
Sec 709 Coordination of Federal assistance

(Figure - 8 cont.)

TITLE VIII-MINORITY-FOCUSED CIVICS EDUCATION

Sec 801. Short Title
Sec 802. Purposes
Sec 803. Grants authorized, authorization of appropriations
Sec 804. Definitions
Sec 805. Applications

TITLE IX-EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT

Sec 901. Short title
Sec 902. Findings

PART A GENERAL PROVISIONS REGARDING THE OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT

Sec 911. Repeal
Sec 912. Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Sec 913. Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement
Sec 914. Savings provision
Sec. 915. Existing grants and contracts

PART B-NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH POLICY AND PRIORITIES BOARD

Sec. 921. Establishment within Office of Educational Research and Improvement

PART C - NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTES

Sec 931. Establishment within the Office of Educational Research and Improvement

PART D - NATIONAL EDUCATION DISSEMINATION SYSTEM

Sec 941. Establishment within Office of Educational Research and Improvement

PART E - NATIONAL LIBRARY OF EDUCATION

Sec 951. Establishment within Office of Educational Research and Improvement

PART F-STAR SCHOOLS

Sec 961. Star schools

(Figure - 8 cont.)

PART G - OFFICE OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH EDUCATION

Sec 971 Office of Comprehensive School Health Education

PART H-FIELD READERS

Sec 981 Field readers

PART I - AMENDMENTS TO THE CARL D PERKINS VOCATIONAL AND APPLIED TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION ACT

Sec 991 National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee

TITLE X-MISCELLANEOUS

PART A-MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Sec 1011 School prayer
Sec 1012 Funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
Sec 1013 National Board for professional teaching standards
Sec 1014 Forgiveness of certain overpayments
Sec 1015 Study of goals 2000 and students with disabilities
Sec 1016 Amendments to summer youth employment and training program
Sec 1017 Protection of pupils
Sec 1018 Contraceptive devices
Sec 1019 Assessments
Sec 1020 Public schools
Sec 1021 Assessment of educational progress activities
Sec 1022 Sense o the Congress

PART B-GUN-FREE SCHOOLS

Sec 1031 Short title
Sec 1032 Gun-free requirements in elementary and secondary schools

PART C-ENVIRONMENTAL TOBACCO SMOKE

Sec 1041 Short title
Sec 1042 Definitions
Sec 1043 Nonsmoking policy for children's services
Sec 1044 Preemption

PART D - MIDNIGHT BASKETBALL LEAGUE TRAINING AND PARTNERSHIP

Sec 1051 Short title
Sec 1052 Grants for midnight basketball league training and partnership programs
Sec 1053 Public housing midnight basketball league programs